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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 HANOI 000104

SENSITIVE
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SUBJECT: VIETNAM CONSIDERING US SPECIES PROPOSALS FOR CITES COP 15

¶1. (SBU) Summary: The head of the Vietnamese CITES Management Office stated that the Government of Vietnam (GVN) had not yet met to review the U.S. proposals (reftel), but thought they looked good in principle, particularly as he felt they had little relationship to Vietnam. The GVN will hold an internal meeting next week to review the U.S. and other proposals and to develop Vietnam's official positions for the CITES COP 15. Vietnam's relatively modest delegation to the upcoming COP 15 meeting in Doha likely will be lead by a vice minister from the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD). End Summary.

No Decisions Yet on US Species Proposals

¶2. (SBU) Per reftel, on January 26, OES/ENRC officer and ESTHoff met with Do Quang Tung, the Manager of the CITES Management Authority Office within the Forest Protection Department of MARD to review Vietnam's positions on U.S. species proposals for CITES COP ¶15. The GVN delegation to the COP 15 likely will be led by a MARD vice-minister and will include Tung and a few other scientific experts, depending upon GVN funding levels. Tung noted that the GVN had not yet met to review the U.S. proposals; however, he thought that Vietnam generally backed the proposals, most of which, he stated, were not related to Vietnam (e.g. The sharks at issue are not found in Vietnamese waters and Vietnam already prohibits coral harvesting). Tung could not yet commit to participation in the U.S.-China proposed snake workshop, which he discussed with U.S. experts during his visit to the United States last month.

¶3. (SBU) Before the Tet (Vietnamese New Year) holidays begin in mid- February, the GVN will convene a meeting of the CITES Management Authority, fisheries officials, representatives from MARD (the Forest Protection Department's parent ministry), the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (MONRE), and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) to determine Vietnam's positions at COP 15. The meeting will also include technical experts from CITES scientific research institutions including the Institute for Ecology and Resources, the Resources and Environment Research Center, Sea Products Research Institute and the Vietnam Institute for Forestry. Additionally, Vietnam will seek input from other ASEAN countries as it develops its final positions.

Vietnam Interested in Selling Confiscated Elephant Ivory

14. (SBU) Tung stated that Vietnam planned to suggest amendments to Resolution 10.10 to allow countries that seize illegal ivory shipments to sell the confiscated ivory. Vietnam has incurred substantial expense, including security costs, for storing several tons of elephant tusks recently confiscated from shipments from Africa. The provincial police department currently maintaining the ivory has stated they could only do so for one year. He was non-committal in response to a suggestion that CITES members look for means other than sales to compensate members which incur expenses in conjunction with CITES enforcement responsibilities.

Continued Inability to Remove Bears from Bear Bile Farm

15. (SBU) Separately, Tung was unable to provide a satisfactory justification for continued failure by the Forest Protection Department (FPD) to remove dozens of bears from a bear bile farm in Quang Ninh province after FPD and the Environmental Police Department documented illegal bear bile harvesting during an

HANOI 00000104 002 OF 002

October 2009 raid. Tung complained that a letter co-signed by the Ambassador urging the transfer of the bears to an Animals Asia bear rescue center had irritated the MARD Minister. Tung could not explain why the bears had not been transferred, even when many were found not to have the mandatory microchips, and stated that the bear bile extraction witnessed at the site may not have violated Vietnamese law, which he claimed only criminalizes the sale of bear bile. Frustratingly, post has heard from local NGOs that some FPD authorities have begun to argue that bear bile removed from a bear no longer constitutes part of the bear and therefore does not violate Vietnamese law.

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